

SCENES FROM SHOP AND STORE LONDON.

By P. F. WILLIAM RYAN.

COMPETITION, we are assured, is the life of trade; and reviewing the hundreds of miles of shops which form so large a fraction of the thousands of miles of streets in the Metropolis one realises its literal truth. Observe and compare shop window with shop window, beginning with the mammoth emporium and ending with the cramped shanty of the byways, and from the richest to the poorest anxiety to attract and please the class catered for is strikingly apparent.

Few women, and still fewer men, can avoid discordant combinations in the arrangement of colours. And the draper has to frame in the space behind a huge panel of glass silks, satins and velvets, carpets, dress materials and woollens, linens, art needlework and hosiery, laces, gloves and mantles, and a hundred other things in a hundred varieties so as to blend the whole into a pleasing colour scheme. The jeweller has little difficulty in arranging his stock, for he relies upon the dazzling properties of his gold and trinkets and precious stones. Mere man stands in wonder before a fashionable confectioner's window. Feminine skill alone could contrive a harmonious picture from coloured sweets, French pastry, cut glass, and gaudy chocolate boxes tied with every shade of ribbon beneath the skies. The perfumer intertwines artificial flowers with plush-covered cases and crystal bottles containing amber decoctions in a desperate attempt to obtain notice for his limited stock. The up-to-date chemist does not disdain glass and silver and velvet in the adornment of his windows. But most delightful to some eyes, at any rate, is the flower and fruit shop glowing with the treasures of garden and greenhouse.

"The stores" is a common phrase in the trivial common talk of everyday life. It is generally understood that at one of those comprehensive emporiums practically everything may be ordered. This is true to a

certain extent only, for it must be remembered that there are "stores" which cater for the humblest strata of the middle class. Those are naturally less ambitious in their aims than the establishments which supply the needs of the rich and comparatively rich. Without quitting the premises of one of these latter, with their acres of warerooms, their tireless "lifts," their well-drilled assistants, it is almost impossible to ask for anything which will not be promptly yours. Do you want a house built? You have but to give the necessary instructions. Would you like to decide upon your furniture? In a moment you will find yourself inspecting improvised drawing-rooms and dining-rooms, bedrooms and billiard-rooms, studies and kitchens.

Do you want your greenhouse equipped? From where you stand possibly you can see a tangle of shrubs and plants, and nestling amidst them the flowers of the season in full bloom. Do you love animals? Then visit the zoological department, and buy a monkey or a puppy, a kitten or a canary. A lion or a tiger may not be included in the stock on hand, but if your ambition lies in that direction your order will be booked and the stores van will soon deposit the exile from African veldt or Indian jungle at your doorstep. Your wife can purchase her daughter's trousseau in one room, while in another you obtain the impedimenta incidental to a shooting expedition. Pass through the "lamp and glass" department. It reminds one somehow of a scene in a pantomime, for there are numerous lights though it is noonday, and the flood of colour is rich and dazzling. Next door are washing tubs and washing boards, pails, mangles, and ladders. Pots and pans are not far away. Move on, and you tread on a gorgeous carpet: all around are carpets stacked in huge rolls. One resembling a great green avenue is unfolded that a lady may judge of its effect. Turn in this direction, and you see silks



IN WESTBOURNE GROVE.



FLOWERS AND FRUIT (REGENT STREET).

glistening in glorious little multi-coloured billows, where they are strewn over a long counter for the satisfaction of likely purchasers. A few steps further, and the confectionery department is in sight. Here there are many ladies having lunch. Some are indulging in the trifles on which woman alone can live and thrive—and shop! Others are enjoying fare of the more substantial sort. Full recital of the resources of the “stores” is impossible. When you have bought your medicines, your literature, your pictures, your saddlery, the latest bicycle and electric plant, flowers for the epergnes, bacon, eggs, and vegetables, fish, poultry, boots, and butter, you may, if you have time, step aside and sit for your photograph, having first made a special toilet, beginning with the bath and ending with the hairdresser and manicurist. Even then the “stores” have not been fully explored!

The arcades are an interesting feature of shop life in the Metropolis. The arcades of the west do not supply everything, but whatever they sell is of the best. The Burlington, branching off Piccadilly, is the most important. The Royal, in New Bond Street, is much smaller, but its dainty shops, bright with flowers or with the most artistically coquettish creations of the milliner’s art, deserve an amount of attention inversely proportionate to their size. The Burlington reminds one

homely rather than of the luxurious are catered for. The partly covered Electric Avenue at Brixton resembles in many respects an arcade, and attracts patrons from the most distant quarters of the capital.

The system of payment by instalments plays an important part in modern shop-keeping, both in the west and the east. It is impossible to mark off certain districts on a map of London and assign to each a particular class of customers. Of course, those who want the best of everything without regard to cost generally find what they require without leaving the aristocratic quarter of which Bond Street and Regent Street are well-known arteries. But no lady who finds in shopping one of the pleasures of her life fails to make regular pilgrimages to Westbourne Grove. The neighbourhood has an atmosphere of its own. Here shopping assumes the dignity of a cult. The pavements are generally crowded with smartly dressed women chatting earnestly—it is all of prices, bargains, catalogues, and such things. In Westbourne Grove man realises his insignificance. That is probably the reason why his absence is so conspicuous.

The shopkeeper who makes his business pay probably devotes more of his time to his books than to his counter. His world is divided into two classes—those who pay promptly, and the others. The latter are

somehow of pictures by a master of perspective with an exquisite eye for minute detail. This impression that one is looking at a canvas is heightened by the shallowness of the interior of the shops, and the subdued light which even on the hottest midsummer day gives the place an air of retirement and restfulness. The arcades at Ludgate Circus have the advantage of lying close to one of the busiest thoroughfares of the City. Here the requirements of the

billed again and again without result. Then the assistance of the trade protection societies is invoked. The tradesman of any standing generally subscribes to one or another of these organisations. The society to which he lends his support will strive to recover his debts by sending round collectors; and in the last resort will undertake legal proceedings on his behalf, for the shopkeeper dislikes nothing more than to have his name announced in the newspapers as plaintiff in an action for the recovery of debt: his fear is lest irresponsible gossip should brand him as a Shylock.

The shopping districts of London are as diverse, not only in their general appearance, but in their methods, their manners, and their language as though they belonged to different cities. In the west the legend "Ici on parle Français" or "Man spricht Deutsch" emblazoned on window or signboard is an invitation to foreigners to enter and purchase. But the foreigner who is well acquainted with London would not be inconvenienced if all such announcements were effaced. No matter what quarter of the world he comes from, his countrymen have a colony here, and the colony has its shopkeepers. There are

shops in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square where everything sold is French, and where sellers and buyers are nearly always of the same nationality. In parts of Soho one might imagine oneself in the slums of a Continental city. Holborn is on the borders of a fashionable shopping world, and when we leave it behind in our progress towards the east we may notice that the shop assistant becomes more direct and abrupt in his manners. These are virtues he never cultivates in the west, where the customer is credited with super-sensitiveness. From Holborn pass into Clerkenwell Road—grimy even in summer. The south side is in the main occupied by warehouses. The north side is one long line of jewellers' and watchmakers' and clockmakers' shops. It is the headquarters of this trade. What wealth lies behind all their dinginess! You pass a solitary policeman, and his solitariness is impressive when one recollects that this is one of the roughest neighbourhoods in London, and that he stands sentinel over as much gold and silver as would build a battleship. Clerkenwell Road is dull, but Old Street is lively, though the artist who paints its liveliness must not neglect to lay on the drab.

Soon we are in Shoreditch, famous for its furniture trade—furniture cheap and dear, polished and unpolished, good, bad, and



PROVISION DEPARTMENT AT A
BIG STORES (HARROD'S).

indifferent. A few minutes more, and we are in Whitechapel. In the west we bowed to shopkeepers who executed orders valued at thousands of pounds sterling. Now we can introduce ourselves to the shopkeeper whose business is done to a great extent in farthings. Take a glance at a small house in a sunless side street. Its customers are overflowing on to the pavement, for not more than half a dozen people can stand within the threshold. Peering over their heads you catch a glimpse of a room behind the shop. Its walls are

for a ha'porth of pickled onions. The next customer is no miniature, but a navy life size of thirty years, deep chested and heavy limbed, a leather strap round his waist, a red scarf round his throat, a cap on the back of his close-cropped head. "A farthing's worth of milk." That is his order. There is a pleasant surprise here for the person who supposes the purchase of milk implies possession of a vessel in which to carry it away. The navy has nothing at all in one of his great brown paws; between the index



BOOK DEPARTMENT AT A BIG STORES (ARMY AND NAVY).

lined with shelves. The shelves are laden with bread, for bread is the principal want here. There are two counters. A man behind one is busy cutting up loaves into small chunks. One would think these were being given away for nothing, they disappear so rapidly. The customers include men and boys, women and children. Their accents are harsh, their clothes coarse, their whole appearance rough; but there is no pushing or elbowing. Buying and selling proceed like clockwork. A child whose chin barely reaches the counter wants a farthing's worth of sugar. A bareheaded boy of nine or ten with a soiled handkerchief round his throat—a miniature navy in fact—hands in a plate

finger and thumb of the other he has a farthing. But civilisation in Whitechapel has risen above the tyranny of jugs and mugs and such things. A strong paper bag is slipped into another slightly larger. In this he takes his milk away. Nobody smiles—so much is humour a matter of locality.

When night descends the business of shop-keeping still goes on in all quarters of London removed from the great arteries. The baker weighs out bread. At the other side of the street a newsagent's is still open, though it is long past ten. The counter's bills of the evening papers on sale within are ranged outside his door. In his window are cigarettes, notepaper, pens, ink, a piece of cardboard to



WAITING TO BUY "TRIMMINGS" OF MEAT.

flour, washing soda, arrowroot, blue, and starch. The little Cockney girl on marketing bent is an amusing person—she takes herself so seriously that, as she hurries from a model dwelling to the nearest ham and beef shop, or to the cooked eel house, she hardly looks to right or left. Her juvenile friends are ignored, unless she happens to meet a young lady whose status is assured by the fact that she

which lead pencils are affixed, a box of Christmas cards, and scrolls emblazoned with Scriptural texts.

A few doors further on is a marine store dealer's. The light of an oil lamp reveals a curious assortment of goods. His stock includes, besides rags and bones, waste paper, old and valueless furniture, veteran bedsteads, mysterious little heaps of battered metal, bottles, and time-worn books. Dolls, wax and wooden, horses and bears, monkeys on tiny painted poles, and other wonderful creatures are in the windows of the little toy shop opposite. They seem to have been there a long time, for the sun has played strange pranks with their complexions, and some of the dolls stand sorely in need of spectacles. The small trader does not worry his soul about what the fastidious would dub incongruities. It is not unusual to come across a shop in a side street which at first sight seems to be an oil and colour store and nothing more. But closer acquaintance reveals sauce bottles with flaring red labels side by side with boot varnish and woollen thread. Beside an oil barrel is often a box of fine Spanish onions; and on the top of the barrel are sundry packages, perhaps containing corn-

too is engaged on a shopping expedition.

Every day broken food is sold on the premises of some of the great London restaurants; and at certain big butchers' and fishmongers' shops "trimmings" of meat and odds and ends of fish, etc., are also purchasable. Such sales are very popular with the poor. On Friday night a great



A FARTHING SHOP IN THE EAST-END.

deal of shopping is done by the wives of workmen paid on that day ; but the following day is distinctly preferred by the people for marketing, and this phase of metropolitan life is described elsewhere in the article on "Saturday Night in London." The small hours of the Sabbath have arrived before Saturday night's shopping has concluded. If the butchers have not then exhausted their stock they open again on Sunday morning, when what remains is sold, even though the proverbial "song" represents the best price obtainable. But this is not the limit of Sunday's trade, for even on the first day of the week shopkeeping London does not rest absolutely. Just as many Jewish houses close on Saturday out of respect for the Hebrew Sabbath, so they open on Sunday by way of compensation. Yet it is not only in the East-End that business is done on Sunday. Some of the streets in Soho, for instance, are crowded with buyers and sellers ; and all over the capital small confectioners', tobacconists', newsvendors', fruiterers', and bakers' shops, as well as dairies and provision dealers, not to speak of licensed houses, are opened on the Sabbath.

Before taking leave of "Shop and Store

London," let us turn into Oxford Street at closing time, and watch an army of shop assistants retire from the commercial battlefield after their exhausting day. Their eyes are duller, their cheeks are rather paler, than in the morning. Amongst the streams of women pouring along the footpaths there is only a sprinkling of men. Some of the "shop girls" are women far advanced in years, some are very young. Many are fashionably attired. The majority affect costumes neat and workmanlike rather than showy ; more than a few present a dowdy appearance—they are too weary to care. At the corner of Tottenham Court Road there is lively competition for seats in the omnibuses going north. Hear the sigh of relief when the competitor has been successful ! The same scene is being enacted at Oxford Circus, where the lady from Finchley parts company with her sister from Putney. Hasten into Piccadilly. The spectacle here is more confusing, but more impressive for that reason. And on a smaller scale these scenes are being repeated all over London, for the shutters are up—Shopland is deserted by all save the unlucky garrison whose task is almost ceaseless.



OUTSIDE A MARINE STORE DEALER'S.